

Dear Friends,

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of attending the URJ Biennial in Chicago. It was a truly memorable, uplifting experience! For those of you who may not be familiar with Biennial, every two years our Reform movement hosts a convention that is attended by thousands of Jews from all across North America. There were study sessions, song sessions, plenary sessions, and a trade show. Plus Shabbat. Oh, my! I have to say that attending Shabbat services surrounded by 5,000 fellow Jews is an experience that is not to be missed. It's like wrapping yourself in a warm blanket of love and spirituality. I learned a lot, and I met so many wonderful people. I met new friends from Atlanta and Tacoma and Toronto, said hello to friends from all over Texas and reconnected with friends from my old temple in Florida. My main takeaway from Biennial is this: We are all facing the same issues and having the same conversations. Regardless of size or location, everyone in the Reform movement is worried about three things. We are worried about security, finances, and declining involvement in Temple life. On one hand, it is comforting to know that we are not alone in our challenges, but on the other hand, it is disappointing to hear that so many congregations are facing the same challenges. Solutions to these challenges are elusive. Over the years, we have been taught approaches like "Relational Judaism" and "Big Tent" and "Audacious Hospitality." These have all helped, but our challenges remain. In particular, given today's climate we are challenged by having to balance "audacious hospitality" with the reality of security concerns. We are addressing our security concerns, and we all want our congregation and the Jewish community in Corpus Christi to thrive. I believe that the best way to make this happen is for all of us to get more involved. So, as we enter a new year and a new decade, I have a new year's resolution that I would like each of you to add to your list. I challenge each of you to add one new and different Jewish activity to your calendar each month. Keep doing what you already do, but add something new. We have lots to offer: Torah study, movies, special events, social action events, events at Greene Family Camp, Sisterhood gatherings, and services on Friday night and Saturday morning just to name a few. There's lots of fun stuff to do, and it's so much more fun if we do it together. I hope to see you soon!

L'Shalom, Greg

Gregory Marks President, Congregation Beth Israel